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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 000260

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: GENERAL NUMBI APPARENTLY SEEKING LARGER ROLE IN
EASTERN CONGO

REF: A. (A) KINSHASA 101

[1](#)B. (B) KINSHASA 245

Classified By: PolCouns MSanderson, reasons 1.4 b/d.

[1](#)1. (C) Air Force Commander General John Numbi and Minister of Defense Adolphe Onusumba (representing the PPRD and RCD, respectively) were dispatched to North Kivu by President Kabila following attacks on Rutshuru (ref a) by military insurgents. Ref b reported Onusumba's readout of his meetings in Goma; this report provides Numbi's readout of his (separate) meetings in both North and South Kivu, as well as some comments about his political activities in his home province of Katanga.

[1](#)2. (C) Numbi told PolCouns February 14 that he met twice with Rwandan Defense Minister James Kabarebe while in Goma. He characterized the meetings as cordial and informative. Numbi said he briefed Kabarebe on the GDRC's concerns about stability and security in eastern Congo, particularly in North Kivu, and reassured him that ongoing military redeployments, including regional movement of two Congolese fighter aircraft, are in response to these strictly domestic concerns and pose no threat to Rwanda. Numbi stressed that the presence of insurgent general Laurent Nkunda was a destabilizing factor in North Kivu which the GDRC is preparing to directly confront. In response, according to Numbi, Kabarebe said that the GOR recognizes the right of the GDRC to safeguard its citizens and confront threats to its security within its territorial limits, and emphasized that the GOR had not, and would not, interfere in this matter. Kabarebe also emphasized, however, that given the state of past and current relations, which (according to Numbi) he characterized as "tenuous but improving," it is natural that the GOR should have certain concerns. Kabarebe expressed his appreciation for Numbi's briefing, which he reportedly said he considers an important indication of Kinshasa's willingness to engage in meaningful dialog to avoid potential problems. Numbi said that following his positive meetings with Kabarebe he had recommended to President Kabila during a February 14 meeting that a regular military dialog be established with Rwanda, possibly leading (after elections) to a bilateral security agreement similar to that between Uganda and the DRC.

[1](#)3. (C) Numbi also spent several days in South Kivu, during which he met with the new commander of the MONUC Pakistani Brigade to brief him on GDRC plans for an attack against the FDLR. (Comment: Numbi has been pushing this vision for at least the last three months, and the supposed plan is one reason why the Third Integrated Brigade was sent to South Kivu. However, typical lack of equipment, funding, and elementary supplies such as food have so far ensured that such a mission cannot take place, although these realities haven't diminished Numbi's enthusiasm for the project. End Comment.) Numbi said that he again visited Minembwe, the Banyamulenge center on the High Plateau of the province, which he had previously visited in December. He said that tensions among the three elements (a group of about 47 military, former followers of Colonel Mutebusi; a group loyal to Banyamulenge military leader General Masunzu; and a large splinter element of former Masunzu troops) remain high. He continues to insist that only Masunzu's presence is keeping the lid on a potentially explosive situation, even though some Banyamulenge political leaders equally strongly insist that Masunzu's presence is fueling the flames of the problem. He did not have a solution to propose to PolCouns.

Not Abandoning Katanga

[1](#)4. (C) During an earlier meeting January 29, Numbi (a Balubakat) discussed what he said are his efforts to put an end to inter-ethnic tensions in Katanga and stabilize the province before elections. As part of that effort he had facilitated a January 17 meeting in Lubumbashi between the heads of the Kasaian and Katangan Baluba ethnic groups to discuss common issues. (Note: The Baluba constitute the largest tribe in the Kasai provinces. The Katangan Baluba, while sharing the same ethnic roots, have evolved into a distinct community which split from the main stream Luba

following a dispute over hereditary succession. The Balubakat are Baluba who resettled in northern Katanga following the tribal dispute. Balubakat is simply a convenient shorthand referring to Baluba in Northern Katanga. After the passage of so much time, however, "Balubakat" interests have become in many ways distinct from other Baluba communities' interests,

although they still do not accept the domination of the hereditary king of the Luba. Additionally, rivalries between northern and southern-based Katangans further complicates inter-community relations. End Note.) According to Numbi, the biggest issue for both tribal leaders was security -- and particularly for the Luba chief, ensuring that there are no anti-Luba activities in Lubumbashi before or during elections. (Comment: Given Numbi's alleged past activities, reportedly including the murder and/or expulsion of Kasaians from Katanga, this is analogous to the sheep asking the wolf not to eat it. End Comment.)

15. (C) Interestingly, even while reassuring the Luba chief that he understands their concerns, Numbi said that he was approached January 25 by the sister-in-law of Maitre Mayumbu (a fellow northern Katangan and, until recently, president of Solidarity Katangese, an organization with solid anti-Kasaian credentials), whose NGO has been accused in recent months of hate messages and attacks on Katangan-Kasaians. Mayumbu is seeking Numbi's help in getting his NGO registered as a political party so that he can run for elections. Numbi said that Mayumbu has been falsely accused because he had a falling-out with Presidential Senior Advisor Augustin Katumba (a southern Katangan and Numbi's political enemy), whom Numbi accused of having originally set up Mayumbu's group. Numbi said he will try to assist Mayumbu to take part in elections as part of his efforts to ensure inclusiveness and close ethnic divides. (Comment: Numbi's assertions fly in the face of reality, i.e., human rights groups have long identified Mayumbu's group and him personally -- along with former Katanga governor Kiyungu -- as anti-Kasaian elements affiliated with, and possibly funded by, Numbi. Numbi's allegation that Mayumbu is Katumba's man is attempted slight-of-hand, consistent with the rivalry between the two men. End Comment.)

16. (C) Numbi said that Katumba and others are worried because Numbi also has been organizing youth in all corners of the province, providing them with civic education and preparing them to support President Kabila in the elections. He scoffed at their paranoid attitude, which he characterized as rooted in jealousy that he had thought to promote these activities but they had not. PolCouns already had heard from both Minister of Interior Mbemba (also a member of President Kabila's PPRD party but from Bandundu, not Katanga) and Katumba that Numbi was attempting to form youth gangs whom he could quickly mobilize either to rally for the president or disrupt proceedings, depending entirely on Numbi's whim.

Comment

17. (C) With Numbi, it is always particularly difficult to determine whether his activities are actually sanctioned by President Kabila or not. Past history has shown that Numbi has a pronounced tendency to go off on his own, attempt an initiative and if it succeeds, take credit, while if it fails, share the blame widely. On the other hand, Kabila's relatively passive leadership style certainly leaves substantial maneuvering room for ambitious operators in his orbit, of which Numbi is one. These factors make it difficult to judge whether Numbi's apparently expanding involvement in eastern Congo, outside his home base of Katanga, is actually fully sanctioned by Kabila or represents Numbi moving into a military void where credit for success could, potentially, be great.

18. (C) We believe the latter more likely. Kabila probably views Numbi as a rival, but is unwilling or unable to move overtly to rein him in. If Numbi could stage a successful attack against the FDLR he would certainly be considered something close to a hero, particularly by the population of South Kivu which has been most heavily victimized by the FDLR's presence. The mere fact that this is highly unlikely would not deter Numbi, at the very least, from posing as the man with a plan whose good intentions were thwarted by -- someone. Ditto the Nkunda situation. Although the prevailing political dynamic is especially un conducive to a military solution, Numbi can position himself as the potential author of success. One could equally speculate that Numbi is actually checking the status of his supposed military and intelligence network in eastern Congo to make sure it is up to his specifications before elections. With him, almost anything is possible. What is certain is that he remains a wild card more or less in Kabila's camp.

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